Nevada Operations Office News

National Nuclear Security Administration

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NNSA Conducts Environmental Investigation

The U.S. Department of Energy's National Nuclear Security Administration Nevada Operations Office (NNSA/NV) Environmental Management Program (EM) is on location in northwestern New Mexico this summer to conduct an environmental investigation at a former nuclear test site. The site, known as Gasbuggy, is situated approximately 55 miles east of Farmington and was the location of an underground nuclear test conducted in 1967.

Beginning July 8, NNSA/NV EM and contractor staff will collect soil samples for analysis to determine if any contaminants are present in the surface and shallow sub-surface soils as well as the extent of contamination. This data will identify the appropriate cleanup, or remediation plans, needed to meet regulatory requirements. Previous surveys have indicated no risk to the public from surface-based activities, and the land surface is currently available for unrestricted public use. However, administrative controls exist for the subsurface (i.e., prohibits excavation, drilling, and digging in the area, due to petroleum hydrocarbons used to support test activities mixed into surrounding soils).

In 1978, the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission performed an initial site cleanup to decommission, or close down, the site. Since then, the Energy Department has conducted various surveys and radiological sampling efforts to monitor the surrounding environment.

Work this summer should verify previous results as well as evaluate areas where chemical contamination is a potential concern. Any waste generated from these investigations is disposed of at an off site location.

Gasbuggy was conducted under the U.S. Atomic Energy Commission's Plowshare Program, which sought to develop peaceful applications for atomic energy. Gasbuggy was a twenty-nine kiloton test detonated at a depth of 4,240 feet below ground surface.

The Gasbuggy test was designed to increase natural gas production using a nuclear explosion to stimulate natural gas recovery by fracturing gas-bearing formations in tight underground reservoirs. The test was a joint effort, conducted with the U.S. Department of the Interior and a

privately-owned natural gas company. It was the first joint government-industry experiment of its kind, as well as the first nuclear gas stimulation experiment.

Gasbuggy is one of nine nuclear test sites located outside the Nevada Test Site boundary that is managed by the NNSA/NV EM Offsites Project. The Offsites Project is responsible for addressing possible contamination associated with nuclear tests conducted in Mississippi, Nevada, Alaska, Colorado, and New Mexico, and carrying out appropriate corrective actions at these sites.